



WATCH YOUR WASTE

Once the pandemic slows down, we need to really up our game in waste management and recycling

Pallavi.Chakravorty
@timesgroup.com

The Coronavirus outbreak has shaken the world, killing people, pushing economies into recession and forcing people to embrace the new normal. But, its impact on the environment has been a positive one. The air is cleaner and waterways clearer. This impact, however, is temporary.

Reality will strike us once we are back to the old normal. Another thing that will be back with the old ways is the amount of wastage. With offices and most public places shut, and people barred from moving freely around or even shopping, wastage of all kinds has gone down. But, the bottom-line is that waste management needs to be undertaken seriously and cautiously.

Laws to manage e-waste have been in place in India since 2011, mandating that only authorised dismantlers and recyclers collect e-waste. But one trip to Delhi's Seelampur – India's largest e-waste dismantling market – proves that the mandate remains on paper. In reality, 95 per cent of India's e-waste is recycled in the informal sector, and in a crude manner. Dipankar Ghosh, Partner and Head of Sustainability and Climate Change, Thinkthrough Consulting believes that waste collection (of all kinds) should be left with the informal sector. "Recognition of the informal sector's role in waste collection has to be better understood. Ideally, collection of waste works better through informal sector, while processing and recycling can be done in a more

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INDIA GENERATED **550 metric tons** of biomedical waste per day in 2018

INDIA GENERATES ABOUT **2 million tonnes (MT)** of e-waste annually; ranks fifth among e-waste producing countries, after the US, China, Japan and Germany*

IN 2011 Amount of plastic waste generated across India was **7 million metric tonnes** per year; it is estimated to be over **50 million metric tons** per year by end of 2041

In **2011** amount of plastic waste generated across the country was **56 million metric tons** per year; it is estimated to reach about **200 million metric tons** per year in **2041**



Source: Statista; * Global E-Waste Monitor 2017

efficient and sustainable way by formal sector. Therefore, a network needs to be built between the two to keep a steady supply of waste for the processing facilities. Currently, processing and recycling facilities typically operate at much lower than designed capacity, and even shut shop due to unsteady supply of waste, which makes it difficult to maintain return on investment as desired for any commercial investment,* he said.



UN should consider a global lockdown for one month every leap year, so that nature can heal and replenish the damage caused by us

B.K. SONI, MD, Eco Recycling Ltd.

Convenience of recycling is also important – In the US, there are EcoATMs which allow consumers to bring in their old cellphones, MP3 players and tablets and get them evaluated. People are paid instantly while the items are either reused or

responsibly recycled. Such initiatives can work extremely well in India.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in Covid biomedical waste. But, with access to only 198 Common Bio-Medical Waste Treatment Facilities (CBMWTFs) and 225 captive incinerators, can India's healthcare facilities handle the rise in waste quantities? Pranav Tripathi, Director, Biotic Waste Limited believes that India's

biomedical waste laws are far better than other waste management laws, but finds lack of compliance as a major challenge. "Steps that can improve biomedical waste management in India are better education, proper training of waste workers,

better segregation of waste at the hospital level and social awareness."

Plastic waste management, particularly of single use plastic, has been spearheaded by the government in a big way through its Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, but a lot remains to be done. To begin with, viable decentralised composting plants need to be installed to reduce the load on garbage collectors. Innovative technologies like plastic-to-fuel and waste-to-energy should be encouraged with special provisions for buyback.

Several start-ups and small units have mushroomed in the past decade and undertaken sustainable ways to manage several types of waste. One of them is Eco Recycling Ltd., an e-waste management company. B.K. Soni, its MD has a unique suggestion. "UN should consider a global lockdown for one month every leap year, so that nature can heal and replenish the damage caused by us."



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